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Vilsack, Pederson Announce Increased Student Achievement Across Iowa

DES MOINES – Efforts to reduce class sizes and improve teacher quality are paying off with more Iowa students showing higher proficiency in reading and math, Governor Tom Vilsack and Lt. Governor Sally Pederson announced today.

“We’re happy to announce today that a trend of improving Iowa student achievement is continuing. These results are more proof that our efforts to improve education for our children and grandchildren are working,” Vilsack said during a news conference at Park Avenue Elementary in Des Moines.

“These solid facts prove that our focus on early literacy, small class sizes and quality teaching is making a difference for students,” Pederson said. “This improved student achievement is a direct result of our continuing work to expand and improve educational opportunities for our schoolchildren.”

Pederson and Vilsack said they have focused on efforts to reduce class size sizes in the early elementary grades because those are crucial years for Iowa students.

“Our investment in education is paying off for these students,” Vilsack said.

“These results are also extremely important for the economic future of this state. One of Iowa’s most important economic assets is our high quality, highly educated workforce.”

“We have a workforce in Iowa that is second to none,” Pederson said. “As we continue to make these investments in our children, businesses will notice the quality of Iowa’s workforce and decide that this is a great place to locate and grow.”

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The results compare the 2000-02 biennium with the 1999-01 biennium. Highlights of the summary results from the Iowa Tests of Basic Skills and Iowa Tests of Education Development taken last year show:

More students are reading at proficient level:

- 69% of 4th graders are proficient, compared to 67.8% previously.
- 69.4% of 8th graders are proficient, compared to 69.3%.
- 77.1% of 11th graders are proficient, compared to 74.8%.

More students are proficient in math:

- 72.4% of 4th graders are proficient, compared to 71.4% previously.
- 73.1% of 8th graders are proficient, compared to 73.6%.
- 81.3% of 11th graders are proficient, compared to 79.6%.

Vilsack and Pederson said the increased student achievement scores are notable, especially with recent budget battles and a national recession.

“We’ve gone through some tough times and faced severe budget pressures because of the national recession,” Vilsack said. “We’ve had to make some hard choices. One choice we made was to actually increase funding for K-12 education, particularly funding to reduce class size so that students receive more individual attention. We have seen the benefits of this commitment over the past few years as test scores continue to climb. ”

“This is another building block in our efforts to create a stronger, more vibrant economy for our children and grandchildren. Higher student achievement is a sign that students are better prepared for post-secondary education and training, and better positioned for economic success in the future,” Pederson said.

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